



COSEWIC
Committee on the Status of
Endangered Wildlife in Canada

COSEPAC
Comité sur la situation des
espèces en péril au Canada

Tough Times for Animal Travellers

(OTTAWA, ONTARIO, December 8, 2020).

Travelling can be tough, and not just for people in a pandemic. At their most recent virtual meeting, the Committee on the Status of Endangered Wildlife in Canada (COSEWIC) found that while some assessed migratory species are doing well, many others are facing challenges wherever they go.



Lesser Yellowlegs © Christian Artuso

After maturing at sea, Chinook Salmon on Canada's West Coast swim back to their natal streams to spawn. Twenty-eight populations of Chinook Salmon live in Southern British Columbia, each with different habitats and survival strategies. Chinook Salmon face many threats in both fresh and saltwater, including climate change and detrimental effects from hatchery fish. At the current meeting, COSEWIC considered the 12 populations of Chinook Salmon most impacted by hatcheries: four were designated Endangered, three Threatened, and one Special Concern, while one was deemed Not at Risk. Three remote populations were determined to be Data Deficient, and will require additional research before being re-assessed.

Steelhead Trout is a form of Rainbow Trout that migrates out to sea before returning to spawn in streams. These salmon-sized trout have been an important late winter food source for thousands of years. Gloria Goulet, Co-chair of the Aboriginal Traditional Knowledge Subcommittee quoted late Secwépemc Elder Laura Harry: "Salmon are our first children", underscoring the significant relationship between Ts'egwllníw't (Steelhead) and Aboriginal people in the Thompson River watershed. The two populations in Southern British Columbia that migrate furthest recently declined to alarmingly low numbers and were subject to an emergency assessment in early 2018. At the present meeting, they were confirmed as Endangered.

As John Reynolds, Chair of COSEWIC and a salmon researcher, highlighted, "These new assessments reinforce our understanding of the urgent challenges wild salmon face in Canada and the need for continued co-operation."



Red Knot © Christian Artuso

The Red Knot's remarkable migration spans the continents, with some of these shorebirds flying more than 30,000 kilometers a year. Climate change, anthropogenic disturbances, and scarce stopover food resources are making this odyssey more difficult for some populations. The Knots that travel to the very tip of South America and those that winter in the Gulf of Mexico were designated Endangered, both with severely declining numbers on the wintering grounds. A third population of Red Knot was assessed as Threatened, a fourth as Special Concern while the fifth was considered Not at Risk. Lesser Yellowlegs, which migrates significant distances, and the Atlantic population of Leach's Storm-Petrel, which can fly up to 800 km a night to feed on bioluminescent lantern-fish, were also deemed Threatened. However, Canada Warbler, another migratory bird that winters in the Northern Andes, has slowed its long-term

decline, and its status improved from Threatened to Special Concern.



Beluga Whale, N. Boisvert © Parks Canada

Beluga and Inuit have been vital parts of each others' lives, ecologies and cultures for over a thousand years. Canada is home to eight distinct Beluga populations, each with its own migration route between summer and wintering grounds. Six of these Beluga populations were assessed at this meeting

by COSEWIC. Though industrial hunting decimated populations a century ago, current traditional harvests are mostly sustainable. There are also some encouraging signs, as many Beluga populations have been stable or have improved. Two large populations in Hudson and James Bays were determined to be Not at Risk, while two were designated Endangered, one Threatened, and one Special Concern. There are ongoing concerns from underwater noise and boat disturbance, which can displace the whales from important habitats and impair their ability to communicate and feed. Climate change may also be a problem, as sea ice retreats and industrial activity and beluga-eating Orcas move in.

Further details on all wildlife species assessed at this meeting can be found on the COSEWIC website (<https://www.cosewic.ca/>). For more information on how COSEWIC assesses species, and a complete list of Canadian wildlife species assessed by COSEWIC up to 2020, please see https://wildlife-species.canada.ca/species-risk-registry/virtual_sara/files/species/CanadianWildlifeSpeciesAtRisk-2020.pdf.

Next meeting

COSEWIC's next scheduled wildlife species assessment meeting will be held in May 2021.

About COSEWIC

COSEWIC assesses the status of wild species, subspecies, varieties, or other important units of biological diversity, considered to be at risk in Canada. To do so, COSEWIC uses scientific, Aboriginal traditional and community knowledge provided by experts from governments, academia and other organizations. Summaries of assessments are currently available to the public on the COSEWIC website (<https://www.cosewic.ca/>) and will be submitted to the Federal Minister of the Environment and Climate Change in fall 2021 for listing consideration under the *Species at Risk Act* (SARA). At that time, the status reports and status appraisal summaries will be publicly available on the Species at Risk Public Registry (<https://www.canada.ca/en/environment-climate-change/services/species-risk-public-registry.html>).

At its most recent meeting, COSEWIC assessed 40 wildlife species in various COSEWIC risk categories, including 12 Endangered, 12 Threatened, and 7 Special Concern. In addition to these wildlife species that are in COSEWIC risk categories, COSEWIC assessed 4 as Not at Risk and 5 as Data Deficient.

COSEWIC comprises members from each provincial and territorial government wildlife agency, four federal entities (Canadian Wildlife Service, Parks Canada Agency, Fisheries and Oceans Canada, and the Canadian Museum of Nature), three Non-

government Science Members, and the Co-chairs of the Species Specialist and the Aboriginal Traditional Knowledge Subcommittees.

Definition of COSEWIC terms and status categories:

Wildlife Species: A species, subspecies, variety, or geographically or genetically distinct population of animal, plant or other organism, other than a bacterium or virus, that is wild by nature and is either native to Canada or has extended its range into Canada without human intervention and has been present in Canada for at least 50 years.

Extinct (X): A wildlife species that no longer exists.

Extirpated (XT): A wildlife species that no longer exists in the wild in Canada, but exists elsewhere.

Endangered (E): A wildlife species facing imminent extirpation or extinction.

Threatened (T): A wildlife species that is likely to become Endangered if nothing is done to reverse the factors leading to its extirpation or extinction.

Special Concern (SC): A wildlife species that may become Threatened or Endangered because of a combination of biological characteristics and identified threats.

Not at Risk (NAR): A wildlife species that has been evaluated and found to be not at risk of extinction given the current circumstances.

Data Deficient (DD): A category that applies when the available information is insufficient (a) to resolve a wildlife species' eligibility for assessment or (b) to permit an assessment of the wildlife species' risk of extinction.

Species at Risk: A wildlife species that has been assessed as Extirpated, Endangered, Threatened or Special Concern.

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<p>For inquiries on arthropods (Aweme Borer, Davis's Shieldback):</p> <p>Jennifer M. Heron Telephone: 604-812-8198 jenniferheron@gmail.com</p>	<p>For inquiries on birds (Canada Warbler, Leach's Storm-Petrel (Atlantic population), Lesser Yellowlegs, Red Knot):</p> <p>Dr. Richard Elliot Telephone: 506-229-9444 Richard.Elliot@canada.ca</p>
<p>For inquiries on freshwater fishes (Northern Brook Lamprey, Silver Lamprey)</p> <p>Dr. Nicholas E. Mandrak University of Toronto Scarborough Telephone: 416-208-2248 nicholas.mandrak@utoronto.ca</p>	<p>For inquiries on marine fishes (Chinook Salmon, Steelhead Trout, Yelloweye Rockfish)</p> <p>Dr. Ross R. Claytor Telephone (1): 902-868-2001 Telephone (2): 902-222-0835 ross.claytor@gmail.com</p>
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